

THE BIN LADENS

AN ARABIAN FAMILY
IN THE AMERICAN CENTURY

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Osama was not in attendance." Omar produced contemporary Saudi newspaper stories that made no mention of Osama's presence. "I did not see or meet with Osama on that trip or, in fact, on any other trip I made to the Sudan."⁸

Bakr Bin Laden did meet with Osama in Khartoum during 1992. He traveled there "accompanied by other family members," according to a family attorney, "to make a plea to Osama to return to his country, make amends with the Saudi government, and abandon the path of political opposition and exile from country and family on which he appeared to have set." This was Bakr's last meeting with Osama according to Bakr. Other family members and emissaries apparently continued to visit Osama and plead with him to come home. There were "almost nine" such missions, in Osama's oddly phrased counting, and they appear to have lasted at least into 1994. Osama's half-brother Tareq, for example, recalled visiting Khartoum in "late 1992 or early 1993." His purpose, he remembered, was "to convince Osama to abandon his criticisms of the Saudi government and return to Saudi Arabia." It was a short visit; Osama said that "he was happy in the Sudan and did not want to return to Saudi Arabia, as he was focused on building his businesses in the Sudan." Tareq believed that Osama was engaged in legitimate business, he later told an American court. Tareq "did not see or hear anything during the visit suggesting that [Osama] was involved in terrorist or violent activities of any kind. Nor did he express any hostility to the United States."⁹

These missions to Khartoum began when it "became clear to us that he had a hand in one way or another in some of these things, such as terrorist operations in Egypt and Libya," according to Ahmed Badeeb, then chief of staff to the head of Saudi intelligence, Prince Turki. "The King ordered that Osama Bin Laden be called into the Kingdom. He was asked to return in order to discuss some of the things that needed to be discussed, and other things that were harming the Kingdom, but he refused to. He was sent a few messages, and his family was contacted; he continued to refuse to return."¹⁰